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Seventieth year

Provisional

7386th meeting

Wednesday, 18 February 2015, 10.15 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Mangaral
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mr. Hmoud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Malaysia	Mr. Haniff
	New Zealand	Mr. McLay
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: I brief the Council today after what has been another tumultuous and deadly month in the Middle East. Steadily increasing tensions and swelling violence have continued to affect the region. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians continues to threaten further escalation. As we warned the Council last month, if this occurs it may have highly damaging and potentially irreversible consequences for both parties and for the two-State solution.

The Palestinians are facing acute fiscal challenges that must be urgently addressed. On 4 February, the Israeli Government announced that, for a second month, it would withhold the transfer of the tax revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority in retaliation for the Palestinian accession to the International Criminal Court. This brings the total withheld to over $200 million. As a stopgap measure, the Palestinian Authority has since borrowed funds from private banks to pay a portion of the salaries of its civil servants. This approach is neither sufficient nor sustainable.

As reported by the International Monetary Fund on 29 January, Palestinian economic activity contracted in 2014 for the first time since 2006. Paralysing the Palestinian Authority's ability to conduct essential Government business, including functions related to health services and law and order, is in no one's interest. Israel's action is a violation of its obligations under the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords, and we again call for an immediate reversal of this decision. The Secretary-General reiterates his call on both sides to refrain from taking unilateral steps or actions that may further aggravate the current divisions.

Against a backdrop of growing disillusionment with the prospects for a return to dialogue, the Middle East Quartet met at the principals level on 8 February in Munich to examine ways to reverse the current negative trend. The Quartet prioritized the urgent resumption of negotiations and a strengthening of its engagement to prepare for a revival of the peace process, including through regular and direct outreach to the Arab States. It also called for the acceleration of reconstruction in Gaza.

This engagement is an important and timely development and should be supported. But we must be clear that, absent concrete actions and a clear unity of purpose on the part of the international community, the Quartet will not be able to play an effective role. Even more imperative, however, is the need to obtain a firm commitment from Israelis and Palestinians alike to put aside their deeply entrenched mistrust and demonstrate the courage and leadership that is required at this time.

Turning to Gaza, the Secretary-General continues to be very concerned about the fragile security situation, the volatile political dynamics and the persistently slow pace of reconstruction. In a clear indication of mounting tensions on the ground and the corresponding risks to United Nations personnel and operations in Gaza, violent demonstrators forced their way into the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in Gaza on 28 January, in protest of the suspension by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) of its cash assistance programme, which supports repairs and provides rental subsidies to refugee families. While, fortunately, no one was injured in the incident, the Special Coordinator temporarily withdrew United Nations monitors in light of this unacceptable incident until assurances were received that such attacks would not be repeated. Pending the much-needed full transfer of security responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority, we continue to hold Hamas fully responsible for the security and safety of all United Nations personnel and operations in Gaza.

The Secretary-General is also alarmed at the reported failed firing by Palestinian militants of rockets at Israel on 19 January and 16 February, as well as their renewed test firing at sea of some 37 rockets during the reporting period. Reportedly, militants also attempted

to smuggle material that could be used to produce weapons. These are extremely dangerous developments. The Israel Defense Forces reportedly shot and injured two Palestinians who were approaching the Gaza border fence on 16 and 23 January, and another two Palestinians were injured on 21 January after the Israeli navy fired warning shots at their boats.

Meanwhile, the oft-repeated political challenges in Gaza endure and represent clear dangers for stability. They include the moribund effort to consolidate ceasefire arrangements and the absence of genuine intra-Palestinian reconciliation, including the outstanding issues of unpaid salaries to Gaza public sector employees and civil service reform.

Absent the full reopening of the crossing points within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009), the temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism continues to provide a measure of hope that genuine progress can be achieved in Gaza. Notwithstanding the difficulties, the mechanism is now functioning and delivering concrete results. As of today, more than 75,000 individuals have been cleared to receive construction material for shelter repairs and more than 47,000 have already procured construction material to date. The processing of approximately 50 construction projects through the Palestinian Authority is ongoing, including housing projects, water networks and schools. Of those, 18 projects have been approved to date.

Yet, despite the mechanism's continued expansion, four months after the Cairo conference donors have yet to fulfil the vast majority of their pledges. Frankly, that is unacceptable. It cannot continue if we hope to avoid another escalation in Gaza. In that respect, both the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, the Foreign Ministers of Norway and Egypt through a joint letter, and the Quartet all made appeals to donors to honour their financial commitments to Gaza without further delay. UNRWA urgently needs $100 million for its cash assistance programme. Support is also needed for United Nations agencies tha are providing vital humanitarian assistance to the non-refugee population. On 12 February, the United Nations, in partnership with the Government of Palestine, launched the strategic response plan for 2015, which aims to address the humanitarian needs of 1.6 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The plan requests $705 million, 75 per cent of which is for Gaza.

While acknowledging Egypt's legitimate security concerns, I also reiterate the Secretary-General's call for Egyptian authorities to reopen the Rafah crossing. The previously reported humanitarian concerns persist, with some 1,400 patients currently awaiting hospital care referral to Egypt and with over 15,000 people otherwise registered and unable to exit Gaza.

The Secretary-General is concerned about the continued clashes in the occupied West Bank during the reporting period. Israeli security forces conducted approximately 470 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrests of some 535 Palestinians. Reportedly, one Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli security forces on 31 January, after throwing Molotov cocktails towards Israeli vehicles in the area.

Some 156 Palestinians were injured, including 31 children and 5 women. Palestinians injured four members of the Israeli security forces, including one during a demonstration. On 21 January, a Palestinian man stabbed 12 passengers on a commuter bus in Tel Aviv — three were seriously injured. Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers continued to take place on an almost daily basis, resulting in eight Palestinians injured, including four children, and nine Israeli settlers injured, including one child. The Secretary-General strongly condemns all those acts of violence.

The Israeli authorities continued to demolish Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. A total of 62 structures, 33 of them residences, were demolished, leading to the displacement of approximately 88 Palestinians, including 49 children. I urge Israel to cease such demolitions and the displacement of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Area C, and to facilitate international assistance to vulnerable communities. Area C is fundamental to the contiguity of the West Bank and the viability of Palestine and its economy.

We are deeply disappointed by Israeli authorities' decision to issue on 30 January tenders for the construction of about 450 residential units in West Bank settlements, at a time when the situation is extremely volatile. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly expressed, settlement activity is illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. It should be halted and reversed.

The Council was briefed extensively on the situation in Syria by Special Envoy de Mistura yesterday. Allow,

therefore, me to turn to recent developments on the Golan and Lebanon.

On 18 January, personnel of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force observed an air violation from the Alpha side across the ceasefire line, which coincided with a reported Israeli airstrike that killed six Hizbullah elements and a high-ranking Iranian officer on the Golan in Syria. The Secretary-General expressed his concern about the violation of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian forces and the potential consequences of the reported incident. He called on all concerned to refrain from any action that could undermine the stability of the area, in full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries in the region and in adherence to all the relevant Security Council resolutions. On 27 January, rockets were fired from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line. The Israel Defense Forces responded with artillery fire and, later, an airstrike.

On 28 January, a serious breach of the cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel occurred when Hizbullah launched several anti-tank guided missiles from the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) towards an Israeli military convoy south of the Blue Line. Two Israeli soldiers were killed and several other soldiers and civilians were injured in the attack. During subsequent retaliatory fire by the Israel Defense Forces into Lebanon, a UNIFIL peacekeeper serving in the Spanish contingent was killed. Hizbullah claimed responsibility for the attack, which it said had been in retaliation for the alleged Israeli airstrike of 18 January on the Golan. UNIFIL is in the process of finalizing its investigation of the incident, with the cooperation of both parties. The Secretary-General condemned all violence and expressed his deep concern over the deterioration of the security situation in southern Lebanon and violations of the cessation of hostilities and resolution 1701 (2006). He deeply regrets the death of the UNIFIL peacekeeper, which the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms, and expressed his condolences to the Government and the people of Spain.

The immediate engagement by UNIFIL and the Special Coordinator for Lebanon helped prevent a further escalation and to restore the cessation of hostilities. The Secretary-General addressed the developments of 28 January directly with both Prime Minister Tammam Salam and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and called for a return to calm and for all concerned to act responsibly. Given the seriousness of the incident, we welcome the reaffirmation by Israel and Lebanon of their commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and to the stability of the Blue Line area. Neither country nor the region can afford another conflict.

Elsewhere in Lebanon, the border with Syria remains impacted by security incidents and cross-border fighting. The Lebanese Armed Forces shelled positions of armed militants in the Bekaa outskirts of Arsal, Baalbeck and Al-Qaa. Lebanon's security authorities successfully carried out raids and arrests throughout the country to prevent terrorist attacks. Politically, the dialogue between the Future Movement and Hizbullah has so far led to consensus on security issues and steps to lower sectarian tensions. Meetings between the leaders of Lebanon's major Christian parties continued, but without success on the presidential stalemate. The prolonged vacuum in the highest office of the State is of serious concern for the stability of Lebanon. The Secretary-General looks to the continued unity of the Security Council to preserve Lebanon from the impact of conflicts in the region and help it to address the multiple challenges it faces.

In conclusion, we see the circumstances in Gaza as becoming increasingly worrisome as we approach the six-month mark since the end of last summer's conflict The combination of the failure to rectify the persistent governance and security issues and the slow pace of reconstruction has created an increasingly toxic environment.

While the primary obligation evidently lies with the parties, a key component of reversing those negative trends is to implement the financial commitments made by donors at the Cairo conference. A failure to deliver the necessary support is putting an almost unbearable strain on an already highly fractious environment.

Establishing a framework that could lead to comprehensive peace must once again become a priority. We hope that the international community, possibly through a reinvigorated Quartet, can help the parties avoid a downward slide and support a return to negotiations. The Secretary-General is determined that the United Nations will continue to play an active role in supporting those efforts. However, international efforts cannot succeed in isolation. Genuine and lasting peace can be reached only through the commitment of the parties to overcome their mistrust and make the

difficult compromises necessary to achieve a resolution to this conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.